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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ITS APPLICATION TO SPORT POLICY ANALYSIS

Joe Piggin

Introduction

We are all discourse analysts. Whether we are reading, debating or writing policy we are attempting to understand the political dynamics at play in its construction and predict the ramifications of its implementation. However, formalised discourse analysis of sport policy requires the application of a theoretical framework, and the selection of a specific method. This chapter offers a way of thinking about discourse in sport policy, and provides methodological considerations for undertaking a research approach that is inherently political. The focus is on the application of discourse analysis as a means of understanding how policy agenda are set and policy decisions (and realities) are produced. First the chapter defines and discusses discourse as a form of knowledge. Second, it delineates the theoretical origins of discourse analysis and discusses how a researcher’s understanding of power will influence the type of analysis undertaken. Third, it highlights some important principles when thinking about discourse in public policy and illustrates these by highlighting some of the recent and emerging discourse analyses in the sport policy realm. Fourth, a range of methodological considerations and techniques are offered with regard to implementing a study of sport policy discourse. This section also considers the inherently political stance researchers take by undertaking such analysis.

Policy decisions affect both people’s opportunities to participate in sport and how we understand the sporting opportunities available to us. As Forester (1993) argues, public policy, ‘by patterning social interaction, could … be seen to shape not only the distribution of “who gets what”, but the more subtle constitution of ways we learn about and can attend to our concerns, interests and needs’ (p. ix). These concerns are of special import for those involved in the sports realm, since there is a wide array of stakeholders competing for finite (and often scarce) resources, and at any moment there exists perceived power imbalances, distrust and a lack of understanding within and between state, voluntary and corporate institutions that are involved in sport. Knowing more about these dynamics will allow policy writers, readers and those involved with sport to understand the complexities involved in sport policy. Further, as an inherently political terrain, sport policy is an important site for stakeholders to challenge or resist potentially debilitating assumptions and decisions, particularly since those with policy-making power often ignore or design knowledge at their convenience (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Potentially debilitating policy decisions that determine such
things as resource distribution and status can be challenged and resisted by those unfairly affected. Many scholars attempt to explain these dynamics by studying discourse (Foucault, 1972; Fairclough, 1989; Ball, 1993; Hodge and Kress, 1993; Chalip, 1995; Taylor, 1997; Bacchi, 2000; Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

**Discourse as a form of knowledge**

Despite often disagreeing about the specific uses and effects of discourse, there is general acknowledgment in academia that discourses are forms of knowledge about the world. These knowledges play a significant role in how we understand the social world, the people within it and how we and others should behave. For example, one of the original writers on discourse, Michel Foucault, explains that what we know about madness (as an example of a discourse) has been:

> constituted by all that has been said in all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own.

(Foucault, 1972, p. 35)

Therefore, a discourse (such as madness, neoliberalism, health promotion or coaching) governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about, reasoned about, and it influences how ideas are put into practice. While a discourse produces a way for a topic to be discussed, and defines an acceptable and intelligible way to talk, write and conduct oneself, it also rules out, limits and restricts other ways of talking and conducting oneself. This is not to say that only one discourse is present in each social setting. Indeed, it is the interplay of different discourses that is often of interest for discourse analysts.

**Discourse and critical analysis**

Sport policy, not unlike other areas of social policy, is a site where struggles over resources, status and identity, occur frequently. Significant problems for policy makers include how to distribute resources (not merely physical resources, but also those such as the granting of legitimacy and status), and how to justify to stakeholders vying for these resources that the decisions are the ‘correct’ or ‘best’ ones. According to Parsons (1995), policy writing ‘involves creating a plausible story which secures the purposes of the plotter” (p. 15). Because these policy stories might unfairly exclude stakeholders or citizens, many scholars believe critical analysis is needed. Chalip (1996) argues critical policy analyses are useful because they furnish interpretations and critiques that can be used by undervalued or excluded stakeholders to challenge debilitating policy assumptions. Similarly, Forester (1993) advocates that a critical approach to analysing public policy can assist in understanding the workings of power since ‘neither incremental-based or utilitarian [approaches] help us to understand how policy making and policy implementation reshape the lived worlds of actors [or] restructure social worlds in ways that alter actors’ opportunities, capacities to act, and self conceptions’ (p. 12).

Since the policy terrain is inherently political, its analysis must be undertaken with a methodology that acknowledges and accommodates this. Danziger (1995) writes that policy analysis (and analysts) cannot be unbiased or objective:
Because standards of judgment, canons of evidence, and normative measures are prescribed by his or her professional community, the potential for professional scientific objectivity, political neutrality, or substantive change are, by definition, curtailed significantly ... the givens of any field of activity, are constructed socially and politically ...

(Danziger, 1995, pp. 436–437)

While all policy analysts have a desire (either stated or latent) to improve the effectiveness of policy, these have historically been considered either positivist or post-positivist analyses. As DeLeon (1998) points out, neither of these main approaches are necessarily useful on their own. That is, most people would find it virtually worthless to write public policy without doing some form of quantitative research and similarly would find it impossible to deconstruct a policy using only a positivist framework. Whereas positivist policy analysts have traditionally clung to the idea that ‘knowledge would replace politics’ (Torgerson, 1986, p. 34), post-positivists acknowledge and examine the crucial role that language and argumentation play in the framing of policy problems and in the assumptions, facts and criteria that generate potential solutions (Danziger, 1995). Schram (1993) argues such a constructivist approach is beneficial because:

[M]ore so than conventional approaches, a post-modern policy analysis offers the opportunity to interrogate assumptions about identity embedded in the analysis and making of public policy, thereby enabling us to rethink and resist questionable distinctions that privilege some identities at the expense of others.

(Schram, 1993, p. 249)

**Power and discourse**

To undertake a discourse analysis is to make some assumptions about how power operates in society. Popular Western analyses of power tend to posit power as inherently problematic for individual actors. For example, Steven Lukes (2005) asks, ‘is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have …?’ (p. 23). This parallels Gramscian sentiments about powerful institutions imposing a ‘false consciousness’ on citizens. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) attention was focused on how symbolic power (or ‘capital’) influences citizens. While each has distinct areas of focus there is significant overlap in their concerns, foremost is how power relations influence rules (policies) in society, the effect these have on individuals, and how individuals and organisations can act despite these rules. While these theorists all provide interesting and useful frameworks with which to analyse power, this chapter proceeds by focusing on Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse to explain how power operates through sport policy.

How power operates is the central concern for many discourse analysts. What is created by the workings of power? What are the effects? What resistance occurs? Foucault conceives power existing in numerous forms: ‘power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations ... as the process which, through ceaseless struggle and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses [relations of power]’ (1978, pp. 92–93). This line of thought is clearly different to an emancipatory understanding of social action, whereby theorists aim ‘to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them’ (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244). A Foucauldian approach does not make such claims. Discourse analysis might draw attention to or try to minimise or replace dominating discourses but ‘emancipation’ is not necessarily total from a Foucauldian perspective. Instead, discourses are ceaselessly reinvented and replaced by others.
Michel Foucault explains that his goal is to ‘criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent’ (in Rabinow, 1984, p. 4). Foucault’s concepts can help policy analysts for various reasons. First, the exercise of power, Foucault argues, ‘is a “conduct of conducts” and a management of possibilities’ (1994a, p. 341). This is also a fitting definition of public policy from a critical perspective. Questions of discipline and freedom are central to Foucault’s theories, and are of great importance for sport policy contexts, where judgements are made about the allocation of resources and criteria of inclusion and exclusion. Second, Foucault’s ideas about discourse and power range from governing entire populations to individual action with institutional settings. Third, Foucault’s interest in the body and pleasure also usefully inform sport policy analysis, which is of course concerned with ideas about athleticism and human movement, physical education and leisure. Fourth, Foucauldian concepts can be thought of as specific ‘tools’ with which to investigate and understand particular aspects of sport policy.

**Underlying assumptions in policy discourse analysis**

*There are a multitude of discourses (but some dominate in policy)*

Discourse analysis proceeds on the assumption that competing discourses vie for prominence in the writing and implementation of policy. For instance, while crime prevention has at times been used to legitimise investment in government sport funding, it has now lost favour (perhaps because there is little evidence that crime is prevented with increases in funding). Meanwhile, with the ever-expanding literature on the physical health/disease prevention benefits of physical activity, these rationale are now central to the prefaces and introductions of state sport documents, as are statements about national identity and economic benefits to be derived from sport investment.

*Some discourses complement each other, some collide*

Foucault (1978) writes that ‘power operates through ceaseless struggles and confrontations …’ (p. 92). Discourse analysts reject the idea of policy making and implementation as a rational and linear process. By examining the underlying assumptions of evidence offered to support policy decisions, the researcher can illuminate problems that are usually not explicitly acknowledged by the policy writers. As Piggin, Jackson and Lewis (2009a, 2009b) point out, evidence used by policy makers is often contradictory, and often clashes with other ways that people make decisions and articulate a policy.

*The effects of dominant discourses need to be exposed*

Fairclough states ‘ideology is most effective when its workings are least visible’ (1989, p. 85). Exploring and acknowledging these subtle or hidden shifts in policy is a common practice for discourse analysts. For example, recently, many state sport agencies have engaged in practices that echo wider neoliberal shifts in society, resulting in policy informed by ideas about performance, efficiency and accountability. For instance, Green and Houlihan (2006) argue that recent ideological shifts towards neoliberalism in the Australian and UK sport sectors affect ‘the capacities and liberties of NSOs [national sport organisations] to act in ways that might diverge from the “desired directions” of government’ (p. 67). Such is the influence of these discourses that they can spread. A study of ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) impacting on sport policy
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in Trinidad and Tobago concluded that recent state reforms towards NPM ‘bore similarities at the discursive, decisional and practical levels of convergence with those undertaken in several more advanced western countries’ (McCree, 2009, p. 475). While of course there will be many positive impacts of changes to management structures, discourse analysts tend to focus on the problematic, hidden aspects of policy decisions.

**Marginalised voices/subjugated knowledges should be illuminated**

Green and Houlihan (2006) argue the effect of policy is primarily discursive; it changes the possibilities we have for thinking ‘otherwise’, with inherent power relations hidden within the contours of sport policy debates. Discourse analysts aim to problematise and ‘uncover’ subtleties, assumptions and apparently common sense ways of organising sport. Indeed rather than considering only policy documents, which are typically written utilising the language of the dominant discourse, marginalised voices should be investigated. In other words, Foucault suggested that, in order to understand what power relations are about, ‘we should investigate the forms of resistance’ (1994b, p. 329). Shehu and Mokgwathi (2007) encourage scholars to adopt a critical stance towards national sport and recreation policies as they are texts bound to specific meaning and learning, with potential to impact on roles and subjectivities.

Recent studies have attempted to identify alternative knowledges. Piggin, Jackson and Lewis (2009b) argue that policy makers utilise multifarious sources of knowledge in order to construct national sport policy, despite ostensibly being informed by ‘evidence’. Green (2004a, 2004b) considers some of these marginalised and alternative voices in English and Canadian sport policy discourse, and asks whether the current structures mean that ‘we are in danger of losing sight of “other” meanings attached to sporting activities’ (2004a, p. 380). While ways of knowing do not necessarily transform radically in a short period of time, discourse analysts who are concerned with issues of fairness and marginalisation usually hope that the act of researching can build momentum towards new, progressive understandings of previously unfair policies.

**Discourses can change**

In 1982, Johnson wrote that governments of the future will find it increasingly necessary to limit the ‘autonomy’ of sport. The extent to which this has occurred has been a central theme in many recent discourse analyses of sport policy. For example Harvey, Thibault and Rail (1995) investigate how the Canadian federal government has adopted a neo-corporatist approach to manage the number of interest groups in both fitness and amateur sport. Adopting a discursive policy analysis, the researchers concluded that pluralism within public policy was ultimately replaced with neo-corporatism (or neoliberalism). Similarly, Bercovitz (1998, 2000) problematises that the seemingly taken-for-granted nature of an ‘Active Living’ (physical activity) policy in Canada contained hidden political agendas and provided a vehicle for ‘the rapid retreat of the welfare state’ (2000, p. 19). Also, Green (2006, 2007b) considered how the sport-for-all policies have gradually been eroded in various countries in favour of elite sport priorities.

**Power is both oppressive and productive**

Power should not be thought of only in a negative sense. Power also produces in that it contributes to achievements and advances in many aspects of society. Foucault writes: ‘One should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with “dominators” on the one side and “dominated” on the other, but rather a multiform production of relations of
domination’ (Foucault, 1980b, p. 142). It is apparent that while Foucault includes the productive capacities of power relations, it is the oppressive aspects that are most often the concern of policy critics and researchers. For instance, it is common for citizens and various organisations that interact with government agencies to consider themselves subordinated by a system of domination, thus aligning more with a Gramscian, hegemonic understanding of power than a Foucauldian one (see Pringle, 2005; Olssen, 1999).

**Resistance is not futile**

A discursive approach to policy analysis contends that people and groups are not powerless. Instead, they can be active in and crafting different ways of knowing, performing and challenging instances of domination. Some studies have recently addressed such challenges. In a study focusing specifically on moments where dominant policy is resisted, Sam and Jackson (2004) argue that an emphasis on ‘rationalisation’ and ‘integration’ raises a variety of paradoxes that may create opportunities for some previously marginalised groups to voice issues and problems. In another study, Piggin (2010) suggests that despite feeling powerless in the face of government sports policy, citizens can influence public policy through ‘public’ criticism.

Eschewing pretence of perfect solutions to social problems, the goal of studying discourses is not to try to eradicate power relations. Since discourses transmit and produce power, they reinforce social arrangements, but they can also be used to expose power relations (Foucault, 1978). Researchers can highlight areas of inequity and unfairness in a discourse, making it possible to act against it. For Foucault, there is no such thing as absolute power, for he claims that where there is power there is resistance.

The positivist assumption of a distinct measurable reality (which much evidence-based public policy is based on) is a popular target for analysts using discourse. Smith and Leech (2010) show that individuals involved with the implementation of sport policy do not necessarily comply in the way policy makers would have intended. Teachers who were required to provide statistical evidence of their sport and physical education teaching sometimes manipulated data in order to assemble evidence in support of their achievement of a self-assessment score that would ‘look good’ in their school’s prospectus, and, therefore, satisfy the priorities of their head teacher. While this may not be considered a noble form of resistance to dominant policy systems, it is illustrative of the idea that there are many types of resistance.

**Discourses transcend individuals**

While policy writers might hold a certain amount of legitimate authority, they are only in the position because of their unique context. Markula and Pringle (2006) explain that Foucault’s position on the workings of power is such that powerful individuals, groups and nations ‘do not arrive at their position because they have power, but they become influential due to the contingent workings … and tactical usages of “discourses”’ (p. 34). Therefore the analysis of power:

should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision … it should refrain from posing a labyrinthine and unanswerable question: Who then has power and what has he in mind? … Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation … which subject[s] our bodies, govern[s] our gestures, [and] dictate[s] our behaviours.

(Foucault, 1980a, p. 97)
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The power of discourses comes from the fact they are used (or put into practice) by individuals or groups. Sam and Jackson (2006) illustrate how individuals are not always powerful by considering how certain practices can shape New Zealand sport policy. They argue that despite a New Zealand sport policy Taskforce ‘giving the impression that it had voiced the shared beliefs, mutual understandings, and common interpretations of the problems in New Zealand sport’ (p. 383), these beliefs do not necessarily manifest themselves in successful and popular policies, since institutional constraints significantly limit the agency of those involved in its production.

A focus on governing processes

Many recent analyses of sport policy discourse are informed by a concern about the mechanics of governing a population (such as citizens of a state, or participants in a sport). As such, many researchers have utilised ideas about governmentality (Foucault, 1994c; Rose, 1990), whereby a population is ‘the object that government must take into account in all its observations and knowledge in order to govern effectively’ (Foucault, 1994c, p. 217). Governmentality is concerned with how a population should ‘be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, [and] by what methods’ (Foucault, 1994c, p. 202). Rose explains this process as ‘interlocking (although not necessarily synergistic) apparatuses for the programming of various dimensions of life … through which we are urged, incited, encouraged, exhorted and motivated to act’ (1990: p. xxii). Green and Houlihan (2005a) discuss governmentality in the context of UK and Australian National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) and argue that some neoliberal reforms have favoured the pursuit of particular goals.

In recent years, the ‘particular objectives’ for the sport of athletics have closely mirrored the importance placed upon elite success set out in the Lottery Strategy 2002–05, which stated that ‘winning medals is just as important as getting people to take part in sport’. Governing processes such as these ensure that citizens believe in ‘a kind of regulated freedom’.

(Rose, 1990, p. 174)

Method

What do we analyse?

Discourse analysts pay attention to one of two themes in their analyses of sport policy. The most popular method is to examine the discourses within policy, such as articulations of healthism, nationalism, economic philosophies (in particular neoliberalism), and gendered or ageist discourses to name a few. The other is to examine the discursive processes through which policy is formed, and focuses on discourses contributing to the policy process itself, such as notions of transparency, efficiency and fairness.

Broadly, Scheurich (1997) provides four dimensions around which to guide the discourse analysis. These include an analysis of the social construction of a policy problem, an investigation of how policy choices are shaped by social regularities (or rules of formation), an examination of a discourse’s ability to define solutions, and an analysis of the legitimatisation process and effect of the new discourse. It seems common practice for discourse analysts to focus on and develop one of these themes through the research process. For example Piggin, Jackson and Lewis (2009a) focus on ‘games of truth’ and ‘transparency’ in order to understand the definition of policy solutions, while Green and Houlihan (2006) focus on disciplinary effects of sport policy. Determining an aspect (or aspects) of policy discourse to problematise is an important
step, since the entire network of power relations cannot be explored in detail. Therefore, it is useful to consider which aspects the researcher believes is most problematic/marginalising in terms of power relations. Indeed, the final theme/s analysed are not necessarily those from the beginning since there are often movements and discoveries throughout the research process.

The researcher usually arrives at the research project with a predetermined interest in a particular policy and discourse. From this point, in order to investigate a theme or discourse in detail, the researcher should consider both more and less overt discursive practices can be illuminated. Thus, it is both times of conflict and ‘common sense’ that critical researchers use as sites for investigation, since the ‘connections between the use of language and the exercise of power are often not clear to people, yet appear on closer examination to be vitally important to the workings of power’ (Fairclough, 1995, p. 54). Policy writers do not necessarily intend to mislead or be unfair through policy. As Gee (2001) points out, we ‘always assume, unless absolutely proven otherwise, that everyone has “good reasons” and makes “deep sense” in terms of their own socio-culturally-specific ways of talking, listening, writing, reading, acting interacting, valuing, believing and feeling’ (p. 79). As with other research approaches, it is important to ‘ring-fence’ the scope of the study, while simultaneously acknowledging new perspectives may emerge throughout the research process.

How do we analyse?

Discourse analysis, like all research, faces numerous challenges to be successful. These include the researcher addressing issues of incorporating text, context and discourse, the selection of texts, deciding how to analyse the data, making a highly subjective analysis persuasive, and determining the best way to write it up (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

As a starting point, it is useful to consult the policy documents that relate to the issue being explored. Fairclough (1995) sums up the relevance of texts, such as policy documents, in the (re)production of dominance when he wrote that any text is always simultaneously constitutive of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief, as well as constituted by them. Therefore, policy documents themselves are a useful starting point to identify dominant discourses.

Depending on the focus of the research, a range of data collection techniques are available. Of course, since public policies (and their effects) are articulated in many ways, a wide range of sites might be useful to explore, including speeches, media interviews, policy press releases, media presentations, electronic media, talk-back radio, letters to the editors of magazines and newspapers. Also, semi-structured interviews and participant observation can also be useful. The discourse analyst must consider what texts are the most important in constructing the object of analysis, which texts are available for analysis, and what texts are produced by the most powerful (or marginalised) actors.

In choosing the particular sites for the research, Phillips and Hardy (2002) have some helpful suggestions. These include asking: Does the research site have characteristics that make it likely to produce useful results? Has a good source of discursive data presented itself? Has a ‘crisis’ occurred that will reveal insight into discursive activity? Once the researcher has decided on the terrain for analysis, questions can begin to be asked about the discourses. Of course, these questions will be informed by the researcher’s specific interest in the policy area. A critical exposition of the researcher’s assumptions can be useful throughout the analysis. As there is no set of criteria that must be followed, here is a variety of questions which might be useful in developing an analysis.
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Policy production

- What are the political antecedents to the policy?
- Which organisation/s ratified the policy’s construction?
- Who wrote the policy? What were the mechanics of its production?
- What explicit and subtle reasons are used to justify the policy?
- How are causes or a problem conveyed? Who is identified as causing, and able to fix the problem?
- Who is the intended audience of the policy?
- What style of language is used to communicate ideas?
- What values can be ascribed to the type of language used?
- What role do various organisations have in implementing the policy?
- How are individuals/groups framed? Who is bestowed with authority, and who is not?
- How forceful are declarations/suggestions?
- How are metaphors, synecdoche and numbers employed?
- To what extent do stories/narratives frame the policy in different ways at different times?
- How are identities constructed throughout the policy background?
- What elements of the policy are emphasised/marginalised/omitted? Why?
- How is evidence used in the policy? To what extent is the evidence persuasive?
- What sources of knowledge (aside from statistical evidence) does the policy utilise?

Policy dissemination

- How is the policy manifested into programmes and what is the effect of these?
- How is the policy measured?
- How is the policy defended?
- What are the ramifications of targets not being met?
- Who is able to criticise? What is criticised? What are the assumed consequences of criticism?
- Is there coherence between the policy and other texts, such as press releases, advertising and interviews?
- To what extent do discourses conflict and contradict one another? What are the implications of this? Whose interests are served by the deployment of certain discourses?
- What discourses are created or opposed throughout the policy process? How does the policy sustain/disrupt/question existing structures of power?

Considerations in analysis

During the data collection and analysis phases of policy discourse analysis, the researcher needs to keep in mind a variety of factors or questions that inform the analysis. First, the post-positivist framework that discourse analysis tends to utilise assumes that any data gathered will be partial, situated and relative. Acknowledging this will mean that policy makers (and citizens) also engage with many other discourses at the same time. Of course, the entire range of discourses that contribute to the entire corpus of sport and recreation policy rhetoric could never be covered. Just as policy makers might be unaware of various discourses at work by others involved in sport and recreation, stakeholders are rarely granted access to meetings, discussions, conflicts, confrontations and editing processes that contribute to final articulation of a policy. Thus, only ‘parts’ of the sphere of policy production can be analysed.
Second, an important concern is determining who chooses the discourse that should be used to minimise unfair domination. Favouring one interpretation over another might merely result in more unfair domination. Giving some thought to this throughout the research process is important; asking how should policy be written?

Third, it is important to consider the day-to-day effects of policy discourse on citizens’ experience with sport. It is apparent many of the aforementioned studies have an interest in ‘alternative’ voices, though often these do not explicitly examine opportunities for the enactment of these voices in sport policy contexts. Foucault argues that studies of power could only take place ‘on the basis of daily struggles at the grassroots level … where the concrete nature of power became visible’ (1994a, p. 116). Given the recent economic climate which has lead to cutbacks to spending on sport and leisure provision in various countries, there is scope for analysis of the discourses that arise with the turbulent terrain. In March 2009, for example, the UK government implemented a policy that gave free swimming pool use to people aged 16 and under or 60 and over in England. However, in 2010, the government ended the scheme. Indeed, this is a site where there will be daily struggle for citizens who did use such opportunities, and knowing more about their experiences would surely assist in future policy decisions. Similarly, the apparent increasing prominence of corporations promoting physical activity and healthy diets is worthy of analysis from a governmental perspective.

Fourth, Henry, Amara, Al-Tauqi and Lee (2005) write that Foucauldian notions of discursive power exercised by those who control the means of policy expression and discussion are difficult to accommodate in comparative analysis if one holds the hard-line view that discourse is situated. However, Henry et al. argue that as researchers, policy writers and lecturers we do work across language communities on the notion of nearest approximations most of the time. Indeed, since there appears to be a homogenising of sport policy discourses in international sport with particular regard to many aspects of Olympism and professional sport, research may well be useful for comparative purposes.

Concluding comments

Making policy recommendations on the basis of discourse analysis is usually done with relatively polite suggestions about recommendations or reconsiderations of public policy goals or statements. This is perhaps due in part to the expected style of academic journal articles. However, there is space beyond research articles that can be explored to suggest change. Indeed, working with the organisations or policy makers who were the subject of study is one way of creating change, as is promoting the findings through media interviews and articles.

The ongoing problem for undervalued and excluded stakeholders is to address how to effectively resist debilitating policies and practices. As an inherently political endeavour, discourse analysis is one element of resistance, since it can expose and illuminate unfair practices. However, it is not necessarily sufficient as the only form of resistance. Researchers would do well to consider what can be done with the discourse. Can it be changed? If so, how could this be accomplished?

An interest in analysing discourse comes from an interest in power relations. The researcher should ask: which ideas dominate? Which ideas are marginalised? What are the results? By analysing these elements, we attempt to make policy fairer. Understanding both the discourses that inform sport and recreation policy and the ways in which its public policies are argued about and contested will enable a citizenry to be less constrained than they might otherwise be.